

## 2014 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

On June 25, 2015, Secretary Kerry submitted the 2014 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (commonly known as the Human Rights Reports) to the U.S. Congress. The reports, now in their 39th year, are available at [State.gov/humanrightsreports](http://State.gov/humanrightsreports) and [HumanRights.gov/reports](http://HumanRights.gov/reports). Mandated by Congress, the Human Rights Reports help inform U.S. government policy and foreign assistance. They are also a reference for other governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, legal professionals, scholars, interested citizens, and journalists.

### **Key Human Rights Developments**

Noteworthy human rights developments highlighted in the 2014 Reports include:

#### Brutality of ISIL and Other Non-State Actors

While our reports continue to focus on the behavior of governments—which are ultimately responsible for the protection of human rights in their territories—the year 2014 will be remembered as much for atrocities committed by non-state actors. The terrorist organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) attacked and killed thousands of innocent men, women, and children in Iraq and Syria, particularly targeting minority communities. Other terrorist organizations—including al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and al-Nusrah Front—perpetrated human rights abuses against innocent non-combatants. Often, particularly in the case of ISIL, they sought to eliminate all those who did not conform to their violent extremist views. Actions by these terrorist groups occasionally bred further human rights abuses in response, either because governments lacked strong, accountable security and rule of law institutions or because governments sought to exploit the threat of terrorism as a pretext to repress peaceful dissenters, political opponents, or members of religious or ethnic minorities. Such abusive reactions to violent extremism, including through the misapplication of counter-terrorism laws, undermined efforts to combat terrorist groups in addition to undermining human rights norms.

#### Unique Role of Technology, Both in Combatting and Carrying Out Human Rights Violations

Even as authoritarian governments become more aggressive in cracking down on free speech and the use of new media, civil society is emerging as an increasingly powerful actor on the international stage, as people in every country become more connected and better informed. A number of civil society organizations (CSOs) are successfully advocating the protection of rights online, developing technologies to protect freedom of expression, and calling out human rights abuses. CSOs and NGOs have used satellite imagery, video, and crowdsourcing technologies to gather information and document human rights abuses in areas where security and accessibility have made such reporting challenging in recent years. Technology is also being used to verify data and help provide governments and the United Nations with accurate information regarding protests, destruction, and violence in countries around the world. It is also being used to help

increase transparency. And yet, authoritarian governments often used a number of overt means to control use of the Internet within their borders. Governments in many parts of the world are increasingly blocking access to standard and social media sites, and in many countries, human rights activists who used the Internet were tried as criminals and punished as terrorists.

### Correlation between Corruption, Human Rights Abuses, and Authoritarian Governments

An endemic feature in almost every authoritarian government is the persistence and pervasiveness of corruption, coupled with a lack of transparency and accountability. In 2014, corruption prevailed in too many societies and too many unrestrained rulers used it to cement their overall grip on power. In many cases, citizens who promoted independent efforts to combat corruption were themselves prosecuted. Corruption also reduced the effectiveness of security forces, weakening governance, undermining the independence of judiciaries, and damaging economies.

For more information, please contact DRL-Press at [DRL-Press@state.gov](mailto:DRL-Press@state.gov), or Chanan Weissman at [weissmanc@state.gov](mailto:weissmanc@state.gov) and (202) 647-4043.

---